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West Phila. homes ruled safe from radioactivity

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That glow in the dark in West and Southwest Philadelphia comes from the Christmas decorations. There are no radioactive homes.

The Environmental Protection Agency said yesterday a street-by-street search has found no city houses contaminated with radioactive construction materials, as several were in Delaware County.

"Southwest Philly is clean," said EPA spokeswoman Leanne Nurse.

A radiation detection truck, which cruised last week past an estimated 40,000 city homes, found no problems in the entire area from Market Street between 56th and 63rd streets, down Cobbs Creek Parkway to Elmwood Avenue, and eastward to 54th Street and Kingsessing Avenue, she said.

Only two spots had somewhat elevated levels of radioactivity, said Nurse, and both were due to naturally occurring granite.

The EPA sent the van into Philadelphia as part of its check of all

100,000 homes within a two-mile radius of a former Lansdowne factory where the problem began. The plant, which operated from 1915 to 1925, extracted radium from uranium ore, then made radium-tipped needles for use in treating tumors. Tons of sandy residue were used in mortar, stucco and concrete by local builders.

In Delaware County, six families have fled their homes because of contamination that might pose increased long-term risks of cancer. (Not all of the 13 contaminated homes found in Lansdowne and East Lansdowne have been recommended for evacuation.)

An EPA crew is still making follow-up evaluations in Upper Darby,

Aldan and Darby Borough. "We hope to get it done by Christmas," Nurse said. Next month, the EPA plans to tear down the factory warehouse on Union Avenue.

In Philadelphia, however, many rowhouses were built before the radium plant began operating, and many are made of brick — a material not implicated in the search. Nurse said contractors who used the radioactive materials may have operated only in Delaware County.

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